

# The last word From Bloomington, Indiana, to Estelí, Nicaragua

by the editors

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JUMP CUT's three co-editors, John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, and Julia Lesage, met in graduate school in the Comparative Literature Program at Indiana University in 1971. We started JUMP CUT in 1974. Since then we have taught film studies full or part time and done left and feminist political work. JUMP CUT has been our main political activity during these years.

Last year at different times we all visited Estelí, Nicaragua, a provincial capital about 100 miles north of Managua which has faced extensive attacks by the contras against the farms in the surrounding areas but not on the city itself. We stayed there for five weeks studying Spanish and living with local families as part of the NICA program. NICA (Nuevo Instituto de Centro America, P.O. Box 1409, Cambridge, MA, 02238, 617/497-7142) arranges room and board with local families, morning Spanish classes at all levels, meetings with local leaders and activists, and opportunities for volunteer work. It is an excellent way to get to know the Nicaraguan revolution from the inside. (Cost for the five-week program runs about \$2000, including air fare, and some scholarships are available.)

Chuck and Julia spent an additional two weeks in Managua working and living with videomakers from the People's Video Workshop (Taller de Video Popular) of the Sandinista industrial workers' union (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores) and the salaried farm workers' union (Asociación de Trabajadores de Campo). Julia had worked with that group in 1981, teaching super-8 filmmaking and from that experience made a videotape on Nicaraguan women, LAS NICAS. John spent an additional week in Managua talking with film and videomakers and also with trade union leaders.

The three of us grew a lot intellectually and emotionally from visiting the Nicaraguan revolution. In fact, the Sandinistas foresee such growth and so encourage people from abroad to visit and share the lives of the poor inside this young revolution. Over 100,000 North Americans have visited Nicaragua since July, 1979. Not only were we enveloped in trust and love, but we lived in an environment where ordinary people felt empowered as citizens. On the level of everyday interaction, we regularly met what Antonio Gramsci called "organic intellectuals," intellectuals from the masses. In Nicaragua we saw that it is the poor who are the intellectuals and have the sharpest political analyses, for they know that they have political power. And they defend this with their lives and the lives of their children.

From the families we lived with, we learned how the extended family networks among the poor, often a network of women, serve to provide for all members in a society of scarcity, and we also experienced how these families have been politicized and kept in a constant state of tension as members go off to fight the contras, are killed, or often return traumatized or knowing that soon they may have to go off to fight again. Each family we lived with not only suffered losses during the revolution, but they had suffered the loss of a cousin, son, or husband to the contras or had older children currently on active duty. Because of the war trauma and because of hope in the revolution, free schooling and health care, there is a baby boom in Nicaragua. The median age in Nicaragua is 15, and there we felt surrounded by children, which made us understand how people are determined to defend a country that is, in many ways, a cradle. Families we lived with shared with us their hope and tenacity and courage, as well as their grief, and these emotions have become embedded in our lives.

From that trip, Chuck and Julia taped about thirty hours of video (VHS format) to record this mixture of hardship and vivacity that we found among the poor people of Nicaragua. The first edited 35-minute program, HOME LIFE, is now in distribution, along with a 47-minute program on Nicaraguan women, LAS NICAS, made from interviews done with Nicaraguan women in 1981 and 1982 by Julia Lesage and Carole Isaacs. HOME LIFE is a bilingual tape in Spanish and English, and it shows a visit to the Diaz family in Estelí. It is intended to be a useful organizing tool for anyone to use who has visited Nicaragua on a tour or a solidarity brigade and wants to show people here what an average Nicaraguan family's aspirations and living conditions are like (for distribution, contact Facets Multimedia in Chicago).

For the last three years John has been working with Trade Unionists in Solidarity with El Salvador (TUSES) in the San Francisco Bay Area. This work involves educating about and organizing solidarity with the people of El Salvador and Central America within local trade unions, which have been moving increasingly away from the usual AFL-CIO support

for an interventionist foreign policy. John spoke about his trip to union groups and showed his slides to rank and file trade unionists. He is currently helping to organize the extensive labor participation in the Spring Mobilization for Peace, Jobs, and Justice, a huge coalition of labor, church, community, peace, and solidarity groups, which includes non-intervention in Central America as a major theme.

Our activity in anti-imperialist solidarity work both derives from and contributes to the political and intellectual process that is JUMP CUT. We have become more sophisticated in our approach to Third World film as we have entered more directly into anti-imperialist struggles. Traveling to Nicaragua and doing interviews, video and photographic work there comes out of our understanding the need to combine the political and personal aspects of our lives and to unite our intellectual work with concrete organizing.

### **Contemporary media**

With this issue, we are changing our name to JUMP CUT: A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA, instead of A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA. Like many others who started out studying film, we now wish to include television, video, photography, advertising, and other parts of mass culture in our formal range of concerns. This reflects the actual changing conditions of audio and video culture around us. For example, feature films are released on videocassettes almost as soon as their theatrical release. Videorecorders have changed television viewing habits and now interface with computers, Radical media makers working in the community often rely on using video equipment from cable access stations and have to organize to fight cable companies that want to close down public access stations with the excuse that these are "underused." Serious television criticism is just beginning to come into its own and has to fight to be recognized in humanities and film departments. Furthermore, with articles in JUMP CUT such as our interview with Daniel Solis on the role of Betamax and super-8 in revolutionary El Salvador (#29), our own awareness of the radical potential of alternate consumer media formats has expanded.

JUMP CUT's goal remains the same — to develop radical media criticism. We recognize a multiplicity of issues — sexual/political, economic, racial, formal, etc. — that need to be addressed all at once if we are to build an adequate progressive cultural practice. However, antagonisms exist between different groups, organizations and constituencies around these issues. We often hear comments such as these: "Film is more effective than video." "If we get on television, we will reach many more people." "Films made in familiar forms with high production values communicate their message best." "Homosexuality (or feminism or music video or Brazil or film production practices or

distribution, etc.) is not our concern."

In terms of the articles published in JUMP CUT, our readers often see no self-evident connection between the various kinds of material we cover. For example, this issue contains side by side analyses of revolutionary Latin American cinema, gay pornography, feminist approaches to pornography, and contemporary German women's filmmaking. By publishing such kinds of material in this way, JUMP CUT has established its own political form, that of coalition politics, a difficult form that now characterizes progressive forces in the United States. What coalition politics demand is a willingness to listen to the political needs of the other groups, and to work together in a principled way for specific goals. In terms of the constituencies represented in JUMP CUT, it means men taking feminist issues seriously, white filmmakers understanding and aiding the struggle of minority filmmakers to produce and develop, straight critics learning the concerns and views of lesbian and gay critics. It means a lot of listening and patience, and ultimately a willingness to incorporate the deeply felt concerns of others into our own approach — even if this sometimes seems and feels contradictory or even threatening.

In the Spring Mobilization Coalition in San Francisco people who wouldn't be in the same room with each other six months ago are working together for a common goal — a demonstration on April 20. Trade union leaders listen to the often esoteric political debates of left groups; youthful solidarity activists and students respect the views of elderly activists; black and latino activists are working together with lesbian and gay activists. Disagreements, bitterness and frustration continue, but a tremendous energy and excitement has been released by working together for a common goal

### **Editorial direction**

The areas or topics that we have emphasized in JUMP CUT over the last ten years give an indication of our political focus as well. However, within that general scope, we have not developed an editorial or political line, but rather a general editorial and political direction. We have emphasized mass culture, i.e., analyses of Hollywood films, and independent film and video, especially that with a political orientation. We have developed feminist criticism and analysis. We have covered Third World film, especially Latin American film. Politically as leftists working in the sphere of culture and ideology, we see ourselves as trying to work on the question of the relation of sex, race, and class within the framework of a shared anti-imperialist analysis. For people whose frame of reference or whose experience is different, this mixture of concerns often seems peculiar. In particular, some of our Third World readers have told us that JUMP CUT seems to have a strange attachment to analyzing lesbian and gay issues, issues which seem invisible in their

countries within their frame of reference as they fight their most obvious oppression.

One of the peculiarities of advanced capitalism is that it allows (or forces) the posing of some issues which do not have the same impact or meaning elsewhere. The contradictions developing in the superpowers often foreshadow what happens elsewhere — contradictions within the mass media, within a computerized white-collar work force, and within polluted, industrialized urban environments. We do not claim to be superior in acumen. We work in the way that we do because we are convinced that a movement which recognizes — in its theory and in its practice — the interconnections of race, class, and sex is the only one that can develop and unite the progressive forces in the United States. And if radical media workers in advanced capitalist countries establish these connections between different types of oppression and build a theory of mass culture at the same time, they will be making an unique contribution to the theory and practice of revolution worldwide.

Our understanding of cultural institutions and their revolutionary potential changes with the practice of each revolution, and our own too. For example, Latin American revolutionary movements are redefining the possibility for a vital relation between religion and civic life, as the Christian base communities and radical clergy assert the right of the poor to have that power which they need to live just and dignified lives. Such a vision has greatly influenced radical Christians in the United States and provides a powerful antidote here to the alliance of the moral majority and the right. In a similar way, women in the Nicaraguan revolution have made great gains and have influenced militant Salvadoran women not to put off defining and reclaiming women's issues until the revolution has been won. Such lessons from within struggles influence other struggles. Learning to deal with the complex interrelation between class issues and those of gender and race marks our struggle here in the United States. And in JUMP CUT we try to articulate that not just for our movement but for other countries as well.

One of JUMP CUT's most important functions has been to get ideas out in the open so that they will be discussed further. We have striven to be readable by a varied audience and yet not to sacrifice intellectual rigor or political understanding. Yet both the variety of articles found in JUMP CUT and the different tendencies from which the articles come have led to misunderstanding and conflict — with writers, readers, and staff.

We see no easy way to resolve all differences. Our editorial board is diverse and in that way effectively functions for us as a political reference point. Finally, it has been our experience that this diversity is a richness, for in attempting to deal with differences among ourselves and among our readers we have developed better analyses and hopefully

learned more equitable ways of working together.

We are getting older and a little slower in putting out issues, but JUMP CUT is in good health, and we look forward to many more years of cultural political struggle.

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